

the Russians. So I expect we'll get this worked out today.

Economic Recovery in Japan

Q. Mr. President, do you think the Japanese economy has turned the corner with the strong—[inaudible]—

President Clinton. [Inaudible]—they had good news, I certainly hope so. I want to talk to the Prime Minister about it. His opinion would be better than mine, but I was thrilled by their economic performance in the last quarter. And I think it's a tribute to the steadfast economic reform program of the Prime Minister. I hope that they will be able to keep doing that. I think it's good for the world for Japan to have this kind of growth. And the United States should welcome it, too, because as one part of it, as you probably know, is that there has been a substantial drop in the trade deficit we had with steel, imported Japanese steel which, as you know, has been a huge bone of contention in America.

So I hope we can keep making progress on that, and I hope they can keep growing, because I think it's good for the world, as well as for the Japanese people.

Q. So do you think Mr. Obuchi's economic policies are paying off now, with the 7.9 percent economic growth—

President Clinton. It's very good news. I know that he wants to see it continue, and so do I. But I think—you know, this is good news. The people of Japan have endured a lot of disappointing quarters. They must be very happy about this, and the people in the United States, we're all pulling and hoping that this is a trend and that we'll see more of it.

NOTE: The exchange began at 10:21 a.m. at the Hyatt Regency Hotel. In his remarks, the President referred to President Boris Yeltsin of Russia; Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom; President Jacques Chirac of France; and Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder of Germany. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Remarks Prior to Discussions With Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom and an Exchange With Reporters in Cologne

June 18, 1999

Situation in Kosovo

President Clinton. I would just like to make a brief comment. The Prime Minister and I are looking forward to having a discussion about the next steps on Kosovo. But I think it's important to point out, and I think we should all just take a moment to reflect on the fact that this is the eighth day of the agreement; 35,000 Serb troops have left Kosovo; 19,000 KFOR troops are in there. They're going about their work, and they're busy establishing security.

The refugees are beginning to come home, some of them even before we think it's safe. But the three things that we've fought for 79 days to achieve, the Serb forces out, the international force with NATO at its core, and the refugees coming home, are being achieved. And I am profoundly grateful for that and very grateful for the strong voice of Prime Minister Blair in our common endeavor.

Do you want to say anything before we start?

Prime Minister Blair. Well, I would simply like to echo those words and say to you that, as we see the full horror of what went on in Kosovo, I think we can see how important it was that we took the action that we did and that we were prepared to see this conflict through to a successful conclusion. And there couldn't be any better testament to the new spirit there is in the world than the fact that we were prepared to stand up for the values of civilization and justice as we approach the 21st century. It's a good basis upon which to kick off the new millennium.

Let me just say one other thing. I think the other thing that was important was the unity of the NATO Alliance throughout this period of time, and I give my thanks to all my European colleagues. But in particular, I would like to thank President Clinton for

his leadership and for his courage and his support throughout this time, because without the United States of America, without your leadership and without the American people's support, we simply couldn't have brought this to a successful conclusion. And again, there couldn't be any better illustration of the unity that there is that we managed to bring this about.

Q. Mr. President, do you really think it is possible to build a multinational Kosovo now, knowing the horrors of the torture chambers and so on that we've seen and the departure of the Serbs?

President Clinton. I think the important thing is to get the truth out and make all the people safe. And then I think we will have to do a lot of work. I think we'll have to give a lot of care to the emotional and the psychological scars of the Kosovars, especially the children. I think that we will have to bring religious leaders together from both their traditions and perhaps others around the world. I think people who have gone through this in South Africa and other places will have to be asked to help.

But yes, I do. And finally, let me say I think—I know the Prime Minister and I feel especially strongly about this—we have to give them a different tomorrow to work for. We have to not only rebuild Kosovo, we've got to rebuild southeastern Europe in a way that gives them the incentive to work together and to accommodate their differences.

You see this happening in Romania and Hungary and other places. Yes, it can be done. But it's going to be a great challenge. The main thing is, we've reversed the ethnic cleansing, and we're getting to the truth here. As Prime Minister Blair said, it is a worse truth than we had dared dream of and we had hoped we would find, eerily reminiscent of what happened in Bosnia. But at least we acted more quickly here. We have reversed it, and I think that's the important principle.

Gun Control Legislation

Q. Mr. President, do you accept the fact that the NRA seems to have beaten you fair and square on the gun issue, on gun shows? Or is there another throw of the dice here?

President Clinton. Well, for one thing, I've been working on this for years. And I think the thing I'm worried about is, I don't want the American people defeated here. I have a simple question after this vote: Will this vote mean that we're going to permit criminals who otherwise would never have gotten handguns to get them because of the NRA, because of the relentless pressure they put on Members of Congress? Does that mean that people will be shot and maybe some people will die, and we could have saved their lives and lowered the crime rate further? I think the answer to that is clear.

So sometimes it's a good thing to lose if you're fighting for what you believe in. It's better than not making the fight. And I have found that if you just keep working at it, we keep making progress. Now, look at the Brady law. We've kept 400,000 improper sales from occurring. So everybody knows more and more the criminals are turning to the gun shows and to the flea markets. Therefore, there ought to be the same sort of background checks. That's my position. That's the position of the overwhelming majority of the American people.

The pressure and the effective lobbying of the NRA has kept the Congress from embracing that position. I understand that. They beat a lot of people in '94 who stood up for the Brady bill. And I hope those people sleep better at night because of a lot of Americans are alive because they were willing to take on the NRA. So I just intend to keep on fighting. I think we'll keep making progress because we're right.

The United States is a great country, but it is the only country in the world that's still living as if you don't have to take reasonable precautions to keep guns out of the hands of children and criminals. This has nothing to do with the second amendment, and we've made a lot of progress—that's why we've got the lowest crime rate in 30 years—we're going to make some more. I'm just getting warmed up. I'm energized for the fight, and I hope Carol McCarthy is and Sarah Brady and all of our allies. We'll just keep working on it.

Reconstruction of the Balkans

Q. Mr. President, you spoke of rebuilding. Do you believe Europe should carry the bulk of the cost of that rebuilding in southeastern Europe, as has been reported?

President Clinton. Yes, but I think the international financial institutions should do a lot of it, and I think the United States should contribute. But keep in mind, what we want is to see what happened—the Marshall plan analogy is overused, but one big thing about the Marshall plan was that in order to participate in the Marshall plan, all the European countries had to file a joint plan to redevelop.

So if you just look more on the scale of what was done for Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic after the Berlin Wall fell, and you add to that the notion that these countries should plan together for their future—and the European Union has been very forthright in saying that there should be more integration within the Balkans, within southeastern Europe and then a closer relationship to the European Union—that, it seems to me, to be—is the direction we ought to follow.

A lot of this can and should be done through the IMF, the World Bank, and I think the United States should contribute to this because I think it's in our interest. But I think when it's all said and done, I think all of this will more or less balance out. We've paid for most of the air campaign, but we're only providing 15 percent of the troops to KFOR. So Europe's paying for most of that. But we'll balance this out.

I think we need to do it in a fair way and we need to stay together and we need to keep our eye on the ball, which is achieving the objective.

Press Secretary Joe Lockhart. Thank you.

Q. Prime Minister, may I ask you if you agree that Europe should supply the vast bulk of the funds for the reconstruction work necessary in Kosovo? And on the question of debt relief at this summit, why all the pussyfooting, why not right now go ahead and wipe out the debts of all the poorest developing countries?

Prime Minister Blair. Firstly, on that issue, we are, in fact, going to take a huge

step forward at this summit in terms of debt relief for those that are the poorest countries in the world. We will be writing off literally billions of dollars worth of debt, and I believe this summit will mark, probably, the single biggest step forward in debt relief and help for the poorest countries that we've seen in the international community for many years.

Now of course, there are things that we can do that go even further than that, but I don't think we should pause from the subject without acknowledging the huge step forward that will be taken by agreement at this summit.

Secondly, in relation to reconstruction, I agree entirely with what the President has said. And do understand, you've got to balance this out, as he was saying, across a whole range of issues. America has provided enormous help and, indeed, the bulk of the help and the costs in terms of the military action. We acknowledge our responsibility in relation to reconstruction. There's a different set of balances in relation to the cost of the troops that are going in now, and you've got to look at everything in the round.

But I think the main point is this. I mean, we will obviously work this out and negotiate it amongst ourselves. But the main point is this: All the way through this conflict, we derived huge support from those frontline states that in circumstances of real difficulty and real political pressure stood by us and allowed us to do the job of reversing this ethnic cleansing.

Now, we said all the way through that we would help them to reconstruct the Balkans, to make the Balkans a place of peace and security within Europe in the future, not a region that's based on ethnic conflict. Our job is to make sure that the promises that we made to them during the course of the conflict we now honor post-conflict.

So as I say, I think we can debate about the cost and balance it out in terms of the overall military campaign, how we deliver the proper administration in Kosovo, how we then reconstruct the Balkans. But the key thing about this is our determination to make sure that reconstruction actually happens.

NOTE: The exchange began at 1:42 p.m. at the Hyatt Regency Hotel. In his remarks, the President referred to Representative Carolyn McCarthy and Sarah Brady, chair, Hand Gun Control, Inc. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Exchange With Reporters Prior to Discussions With Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder of Germany in Cologne

June 18, 1999

Character Education in Public Schools

Q. Mr. President, in another House action, the House has passed a measure which would permit the Ten Commandments to be posted in public schools. Do you think that's constitutional?

President Clinton. I think it raises constitutional questions. I think what they're trying to do is to say that the schools ought to teach basic elements of character education, and I agree with that. And Secretary Riley and I have worked on that for several years, now. So I would—what I would like to do is to—rather than get into a big constitutional fight, is to have the Secretary meet with the Members of Congress, show them what we're trying to do in this area that is plainly constitutional, and maybe get them to support that, so we can intensify our efforts.

And the idea that the schools ought to build the character of children I think is a very good idea. But it ought to be done in a way that respects the wide diversity of our student body and that doesn't lead to a long, drawn-out legal challenge.

I understand the impulse behind it, and I think the impulse is good. We just have to be—we don't want to raise constitutional questions. There is another option here that I think achieves their objective. I'm going to—when I get home I'm going to talk to them about it.

NATO-Russia Negotiations on Kosovo

Q. [*Inaudible*—you think there will be a solution with the Russians concerning the problems in Kosovo?

President Clinton. I do. The Chancellor and I—we're going to talk about it.

I'd like to begin by thanking the *Bundeskanzler* for hosting this and for doing such an outstanding job, not only leading the G-8 but also leading the EU in this period and for being a wonderful leader in our Alliance in the campaign in Kosovo.

We have been working very hard in the last days, as you know, to get our troops in as the Serbs leave. Today, we have 19,000 in; 35,000 of theirs have gone. And this is a good day. And I do believe, based on what I have just heard, that we have a good chance of reaching a resolution today on the role in the Russians in our KFOR. So we have to discuss this, but I think if we can get everybody together on this in the next couple of hours, we'll have an agreement. I'm hoping.

Debt Relief

Q. Chancellor Schroeder, the indebted nations want debt forgiveness now, about \$100 billion. Is that doable?

Chancellor Schroeder. I think that sum will certainly not be achieved, whatever it will get to. But we certainly get together here during the summit to talk about the fact that we would like to assist the poorest countries with their development and their debt problems.

We, of course, have to—we're at the beginning of the summit—have to go in and discuss the more finite detail, and then we'll come up with a result which we'll share with you at the end of the summit, and not now, at the beginning. [*Laughter*]

NOTE: The exchange began at 2:51 p.m. in the Isabellensaal Room at the Gurzenich. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Statement on House Action on Gun Control Legislation

June 18, 1999

Instead of closing the deadly gun show loophole, the House of Representatives voted in the dark of night to let criminals keep buying guns at gun shows. This vote will not stand the light of day. I will keep working until the Congress stands up to the gun lobby and makes the commonsense measures passed by the Senate the law of